Fire & Rescue – Emergency Operations
"Guidelines and Best Practices"
Next-Generation Incident Command System (NICS)
NICS User's Group
April - 2014

Purpose and Goal of this Paper:

The Purpose and Goal of this paper is to provide the NICS User Community with the most current, validated set of "guidelines and best practices" when supporting Fire & Rescue – Emergency Operations type incidents in NICS. This information is based upon user experiences gained since 2011 and is intended to help guide a standardized use and understanding of NICS by all community members.

Further documents like this will be prepared as we gain additional experience with NICS on other types of all-hazard/all-risk incidents.

NICS should not be used to replace or circumvent the established Intelligence and Information gathering, processing, approval and dissemination responsibilities outlined in ICS 420-1 or NIMS. Rather NICS should be used to enhance established Intelligence and Information processes by facilitating what now takes 12 hours to process, into 12 minutes.

Each participating organization is strongly encouraged to develop their own NICS-specific written internal policy directives or guidelines that detail the: who, what, when, where, why and how these guidelines and best practices will be adopted and implemented by their own organization.

Background:

The NICS Project is a work in progress. It is a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science & Technology Directorate (S&T) funded research project that is being developed and supported by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and its Lincoln Laboratory (LL). MITLL is a Federally Funded Research & Development Center (FFRDC) chartered to apply advanced technology to the problems of national security. The purpose of the NICS evaluation process, principally but not exclusively being carried out in California, is to help the NICS User's Group determine its ability to improve the all-risk missions of each participating organization. This evaluation process will also further assist both the NICS User's Group and MITLL in the testing, development, and future funding of the overall NICS Project.

General Guidelines and Best Practices:

1. The initial use of NICS should be limited to the following areas of information dissemination in order to provide a standardized operational picture for each NICS supported incident. This information would be immediately available within the **IncidentMap** and **WorkingMap** rooms of NICS, the two rooms that are automatically created when a new incident is created. These two rooms are designed to support the already established incident command and control information dissemination processes as outlined below.

a. The **IncidentMap** room is designed and intended to provide a highly controlled room where information can be added by **authorized users only**. However, the information in this room is **always viewable** by the entire NICS community. Other community members can then use this information to develop their own situational awareness (SA) by simply viewing the available information or by using the SELECT-COPY-PASTE function to move information from the IncidentMap room to their own "My Map" room space. The Whiteboard Chat space of this room is also available to all community members to post additional incident related information.

b. The **WorkingMap** room is designed and intended to provide a less controlled workspace where highly detailed incident intelligence and information **is always available** for sharing between individual users. The Whiteboard Chat space of this room is also available to all community members to post additional incident related information.

c. **Attribution Box** – If you double click on any graphic, symbol, or text, a comment window appears. By selecting "Edit Attributes" you can enter comments and data related to that item. Any other user can then double click on that item and see your comments/data.

2. IncidentMap – When applicable, the following incident information should be provided within the **IncidentMap** room within one (1) hour or best effort, of an incident being established in NICS:

a. Identify the "**Incident Origin**" using the ICS Incident Origin symbol () provided within the Drawing Tools, Symbols, ICS Symbols Palette. This origin is considered proximal based upon the original dispatched incident location, and may be edited later to reflect the more exact point of origin. The additional details of incident report time and date can be provided within the provided attribution box/space when possible.

b. Identify the "**Incident Command Post** (ICP) using the ICP symbol () provided within the Drawing Tools, Symbols, ICS Symbols Palette. Provide the Incident Commander's name and contact information, ICP address, and other information within the provided attribution box space when possible.

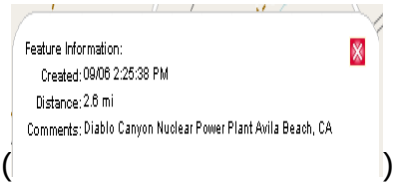
c. Draw the **estimated incident perimeter** using the "Uncontrolled Fire Edge Line" line segment ()provided within the Drawing Tools-Draw Lines-Wildland Fire Styles for wildland fires or a narrow red, dashed line for non-wildland fire incident types (- - - -). Provide the size or scope of the estimated perimeter within the provided attribution box or Whiteboard Chat space when possible. This initial perimeter is considered proximal and should not be considered "to-scale" for purposes of determining definitive acreage or area involved.

f. Identify any **Life/Safety Hazards** using the "Three Strips" ICS symbol () provided within Drawing Tools, Symbols, ICS Symbols palette. Use the provided attribution box to identify the type of hazard or other important hazard description information when possible.

3. IncidentMap or Incident Created Rooms - Other "Guidelines" to Consider- The following examples should be considered when the responsible room administrator wants to convey the following types of information to other Community members. Either within the IncidentMap room or other incident created open or secure rooms:

a. Draw the **predicted fire or incident spread** using the "Fire Spread Prediction" line segment () provided within Drawing Tools-Draw Lines-Wildland Fire Styles as a directional arrow for wildland fires or a narrow orange, dashed line for non-wildland fire incident types (- - - -). Provide the estimated time-frames associated with each prediction within the provided attribution box when possible.

b. Draw the **wind direction** using a narrow blue arrow () to indicate the from (arrow tail) to (arrow head) provided within Drawing Tools-Draw Lines-Narrow Line-Vertex line option. Provide the estimated direction, wind speed, gusts speeds, and other weather related information within the provided attribution box when possible.

c. Identify any **critical infrastructure or community assets** using a bright pink, dashed line () provided within Drawing Tools-Draw Lines-Dashed Line. Provide a description of the infrastructure or asset using the provided attribution box when possible (

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d. **Identify communities, residential properties and assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production** at risk using a bright green, dashed line () provided within Drawing Tools-Draw Lines-Dash Line. Provide a description of the at-risk communities, etc… using the provided attribution box when possible.

e. **Identify any areas where Evacuation Notifications** have been issued by the responsible law enforcement organization. Using the Drawing Tools-Draw Shapes–Draw Vertex Polygon tool trace the outer boundaries or otherwise highlight the assets outlined in item (d) above. List the Evacuation type within the provided attribution box. Use the following polygon colors to correspond with the levels of evacuation notification and local naming convention that the responsible law enforcement has issued:

Red – 1st highest level e.g.

Yellow – 2nd level e.g.

Light Blue – 3rd level when necessary

4. WorkingMap - When applicable, the following incident information should be provided within the **WorkingMap** room within four (4) hours or best effort, of the incident being established in NICS:

a. Provide the **Incident Organizational Structure** using the ICS symbols provided within Drawing Tools, Symbols, ICS Symbols palette for Division/Groups and Branches. Use rotation tool to align.

b. Provide the **corresponding letter, group name or number** for each functional area or group using the Drawing Tools, Symbols, ICS Symbols palette or Text function, black text.(Best Practices - item b, page 6)

c. Identify any **Staging Areas** location using the symbol () provided within Drawing Tools, Symbols, ICS Symbols palette. Use the provided attribution box to identify the Staging Area's Name, manager's name, and contact information when possible.

d. Identify the **Helibase** location using the symbol () provided within Drawing Tools, Symbols, ICS Symbols palette. Use the provided attribution box to identify the manager's name and contact information when possible.

e. Identify any **Drop Point** locations using the symbol () provided within Drawing Tools, Symbols, ICS Symbols palette. Number the Drop Point using the Text function within the Drawing Tools. Use the medium text font, black text. Use the provided attribution box to provide the Drop Point's location description when possible. (Best Practices-item c, page 6)

f. Identify any **Heli-spot** locations using the symbol () provided within Drawing Tools, Symbols, ICS Symbols palette. Number the Heli-spot using the Text function within the Drawing Tools; use the medium text font, dark blue text. Use the provided attribution box to provide any additional information. (Best Practices-item c, page 6)

5. Room Management:

a. The assigning, and control of user access rights to the IncidentMap room and other rooms created within NICS is the sole responsibility of the organization that originally created the incident. The room rights are automatically assigned to the original room creator by NICS and are then re-assignable by the creator of the room to other users.

b. The WorkingMap room should normally not be secured.

c. Rooms **will not** be created, secured, or made private without the approval of the I.C. or their designee.

d. All custom created "new rooms" will follow an agreed upon naming convention as determined and approved by the Incident Commander, Operations Section Chief, or the Plans Section Chief. The name of these incident created rooms will included the name and specific room functional purpose,

e.g. **Evacuations – Intel - ContingencyPlanning_7_4_2011,** or ICS function - **OSC1_Night**. The date should be included whenever applicable.

6. Extended Attack and Incident Management Team Responsibilities:

a. When NICS is being utilized by an agency, Unit or Team - the Plans Section Chief or their designee should announce that fact at each briefing or meeting.

b. Once the IncidentMap and WorkingMap rooms have been established, as outlined above in #2 & #4, updates should be made as outlined below:

Initial Operational Period:

1. Every six (6) hours or more frequently as incident activity warrants

2. One (1) hour prior to the beginning of the next Operational Period briefing

3. Follow-onOperational Periods:

a. Update times of: 0600, 1200, 1800, 0000are recommended
c. The 0000 update timeframe is a "best effort" based upon incident activity requirements
d. As otherwise directed by the Incident Commander, Plans Section Chief or their designee

c. When there is no new room information to update, the Whiteboard Chat area should be used to record and convey that fact as shown below:

Nothing new to report at this time

d. The Whiteboard Chat function area should also be used to provide additional room details or facts instead of posting that information in the room whenever possible.

7. Data Uploading:

a. The incident or file name and other relevant information should be listed in the "Create Display Name in NICS" box during the upload process.

Incident_Name_YYYYMMDD_TTTT_File_name.e.g.Smith20130909_1735_DivD_Dozerline

b. All data that is uploaded in direct support of an incident will be moved to its corresponding incident data folder as soon as possible.

c. Duplicate or unnamed data files should be deleted as soon as possible.

8. Archiving Incidents:

a. Any organization that creates an incident is responsible for archiving their closed incident within 12 hours of that incident being declared closed. The purpose is to keep the list of active incidents as accurate as possible during periods of high activity.

b. The designated Incident Commander or the ECC/Dispatch Center of the responsible organization, whose Incident Prefix is assigned to the incident in question, will determine when an active NICS incident will be archived.

c. The Director of the CA-NICS Users Group or his designee may archive any confirmed closed incidents that are still listed in the NICS Incident dropdown menu after 24 hours of that incident being declared closed.

"Other Best Practices & General Concepts"

a. Less is sometimes better. Creating a new room to display specific information instead of trying to fit everything into an already busy room is a good practice.

b. Adding "text" – limit your use of the large font size to the following: general room header information, division – groups and branches. Use the medium and small font sizes as much as possible.

c. Try to use the attribution box function to add information to lines or symbols instead of adding text to the map.

d. The thin line style is your best choose for displaying general line information. The medium and large line styles tend to cover-up valuable information and add clutter.

e. The dash line tool is also a good line drawing choice when outlining, highlighting or tracing information.

f. Remember the versatility of the vertex line and polygon drawing tools (e.g., for making crisp arrows, nice polygons, tracing).

g. When building room information using "drawing tools," build shorter line segments that can be easily changed. This will help other users to make adjustments or changes to those shorter line segments throughout the incident's life-cycle, without having to redraw the entire incident perimeter.

h. Remember to consider your base map layer options and which layer (topographical, aerial, and streets) will work best for displaying each room's information. Use line colors that work best with that base map decision. Use text or Whiteboard chat to tell your users which base map layer they need to use for best viewing.

i. Remember to use the "Move other to my current map location" function to set the opening location and zoom scale for the rooms you create or control.

j. Remember to archive information into secure room(s) as the incident progresses. A good practice is to create and secure rooms (Progression, archive_8_31_13_OpsPer) that can be used to organize and secure information that is no longer relevant to the current status of the incident. The ability to access this archived information has proven to be of significant value, both during and post incident.

k. Use the provided Wildland Fire Styles lines when developing or updating wildland incident rooms. Draw-Pencil (Draw Lines)-Wildland Fire Styles

l. Numerous ICS/NIMS and military symbols are available within-Draw-Draw Symbols (upper left-red symbol)

m. Use the *Logout* feature (upper rt.) when exiting NICS – do not x out of the application